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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING IMMEDIATE 2055
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO IMMEDIATE 0145
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA IMMEDIATE 0155
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE 0628
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 0444
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU IMMEDIATE 0152
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE 0311
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE IMMEDIATE 2450
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 1837
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 000384

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN

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SUBJECT: KYRGYZ PM ATAMBAYEV ON INTERNAL POLITICAL CRISIS
AND MANAS AIR BASE

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Classified By: Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. On April 6, the Ambassador met with newly appointed Prime Minister Almaz Atambayev, who said that the opposition had boxed itself into a corner by demanding the President's resignation, and it was difficult to see a face-saving way forward. Atambayev sharply criticized both former PM Kulov and President Bakiyev, both of whom, he claimed, used their positions to steal from the country. Atambayev chastised the Ambassador for allowing the issues surrounding the Ivanov shooting incident at Manas Air Base to continue for so long and urged U.S. to settle the outstanding base issues. END SUMMARY.

OPPOSITION HAS BOXED ITSELF IN

12. (C) On April 6, the Ambassador met one-on-one with Prime Minister Almaz Atambayev, who was clearly feeling happy with his appointment, although he laughed when the Ambassador offered congratulations and suggested that sympathy was more appropriate. Atambayev launched directly into his views of the political crisis. He said that former Prime Minister and United Front leader Feliks Kulov had boxed himself into a corner. His demands were so extreme, i.e. demanding the President's resignation, that there is no room for compromise, according to Atambayev. Before, he said, the opposition had called for "reform or resignation," now it was "reforms without Bakiyev." He claimed that Kulov doesn't know how to get out of this fix.

IMPORTANCE OF RESTRAINT

13. (C) Ambassador noted that the administration also had a role to play in resolving the situation. Atambayev responded that both he and the President had said they were ready for discussions any time and in any format. The Ambassador repeated the U.S. message that both sides need to show restraint and solve the political issue legally, constitutionally, and peacefully. She noted that the U.S. was concerned about the pro-Bakiyev "women's battalions" that Presidential Advisor Usen Sydykov was reputed to be organizing in the South and by the recent release from jail of shady coal dealer Nurlan Motuyev, who was almost certainly tasked with organizing "anti-meetings" of pro-Bakiyev forces.

Nodding and looking grave, Atambayev said this was a problem and he would talk to the President about this. He said that he was also going to talk to Minister of Interior Nogibayev about using rubber bullets.

14. (C) Atambayev said that he maintains contacts with the opposition and many are still his friends. He was planning on going to the square in the afternoon as his friend, Parliamentarian Meles Eshimkanov, was one of the hunger-strikers. He added that on April 11, when the demonstrations in Bishkek start, he will also go to the square to talk to the demonstrators. He said that he's been warned against doing this by the opposition, but he wants to talk to them and he also wants to ensure that there are no other demonstrations going on that could lead to a conflict.

DEFENDING THE COUNTRY

15. (C) Atambayev said that he had accepted the PM position, because if the President leaves office, the country would be split. He was "defending the country." He said that despite

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the political crisis, work continues. That morning, he had chaired a meeting of the newly-formed Constitutional Working Group. Unanimously, the members had agreed to work on the basis of the November 2006 constitution. He said that he had reviewed the Baibolov-proposed constitution and dismissed it out-of-hand as a constitution written as a vehicle for Kulov.

He said that the next step on creating a public television station out of KTR rested with parliament, as it had responsibility to name a fifteen person steering board. Atambayev, said as a businessman, he understood economics and had declared there would be no nationalization of the Kumtor gold mine or any other privately-held company. It was important to sort out the various mining claims, as well, he said.

NOT QUITE A COALITION GOVERNMENT

16. (C) Atambayev admitted some disappointment in the new Cabinet, although he said there were "better people" heading the customs and tax agencies now. He said that for each post the Prime Minister forwards several names to the President, who made the final choice. One name he said he was not pleased about was newly reappointed Minister of Justice Marat Kaipov, who Atambayev said facilitates the stealing. Even so, he said the Cabinet has been "educated" that they need to work, and they need to stop stealing. He has told each Cabinet member and the President himself that he will exclude members from the government if they don't follow his instructions. Atambayev said they must work for him, "not the family," and he said they will listen to him, because, "they know my character." On the other hand, Atambayev was pleased with the membership of the Constitutional Working Group, which he described as a commission made up of the opposition.

KULOV AND BAKIYEV: PARTNERS IN CRIME

17. (C) Turning to his nemesis, Atambayev said that Kulov is

incapable of running the country. He noted that while Kulov said that he could not do anything as PM, in fact he had done a lot: he had stolen for two years. Kulov's signature was on many of the dodgy privatization papers and other questionable actions that had taken place over the last two years, Atambayev claimed. He said he does not respect Kulov, who used his tenure as PM "to steal with Bakiyev." Ambassador asked what the PM's relationship was like with Bakiyev? How could the two work together, given Atambayev's statements, and would the President change his ways? Atambayev said his relationship with the President was "difficult." The President was used to Kulov agreeing with him on everything - and aiding and abetting theft. He mused that the President could fire him, if the relationship becomes too uncomfortable.

URGES PROMPT RESOLUTION TO MANAS AIR BASE ISSUES

18. (C) Atambayev then turned to a number of issues related to Manas Coalition Air Base. He chastised the Ambassador for allowing the issues surrounding the December 6 Ivanov incident to continue for so long; he was "ashamed," of the U.S. for the manner in which it was handling the matter. Noting the "big mistake" of providing the \$1000 interim payment to Ivanov's widow, as well as the December Parliamentary resolution, he urged Ambassador to make a generous, final payment. He also urged the U.S. to conclude the matter of the September collision of a U.S. refueling tanker with the "President's plane," and noted that these

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incidents raise anti-Base, anti-American sentiment among the Kyrgyz people.

19. (C) He also asked why the U.S. had recently issued a diplomatic note requesting overflight clearance for various plane types including bombers and fighters. Was this in preparation for a possible war in Iran, he asked. Ambassador provided background on the issues and assured Atambayev that Iran was being handled diplomatically and that the 2001 exchange of diplomatic notes spells out that the only purpose for the base is for support of the fight in Afghanistan. She added that she thought the diplomatic note was a routine request, but would follow up. (NOTE: The diplomatic note in question was the most recent of our quarterly requests for routine blanket flight clearances for the base. END NOTE.) Atambayev mused to the Ambassador that he believed the Parliament would be more supportive of the President - and by extension also of the Base - in the Fall, clearly implying that there might be early parliamentary elections after the summer.

COMMENT

10. (C) Atambayev was clearly in his element as prime minister and can't quite believe he's in that exalted position. He is interested in working with the U.S., and while he is not completely pro-American, of the last three prime ministers, he is the most progressive and the most pro-reform. He is impulsive and emotional, but we believe that we will be able to deal with him in a way that wasn't possible with his predecessors. That said, given the self-described "difficult" relationship with Bakiyev, it is not clear how much running room Atambayev will have or how long he will last as prime minister. Bakiyev needs him now, but will he ditch an inconvenient PM when he is feeling stronger, much as he did with Kulov in December?

YOVANOVITCH